

Advanced-Level Menus
YEARS 6-8



Differentiating Instruction With Menus

Science

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choices has to be somewhat animated and specific. For example, if the content is all very similar, the focus should be on the product: “If you want to create something you might see on YouTube, this one is for you!” or “If you want to be artistic, check this one as a maybe!” The more exposure students have to the processing the teacher provides, the more skillful they become in their choice making.

How Can Teachers Allow Choice?

“The students seem to get more involved in assignments when they have choice. They have so many creative ideas and the menus give them the opportunity to use them.”

– Secondary teacher, when asked about how students respond to having choices

When people visit a restaurant, they are all attending with the common goal of finding something on the menu to satisfy their hunger. We all hope that when students come into our classroom, they will have a hunger as well, a hunger for learning. Choice menus are a way of allowing students to choose how they would like to satisfy their hunger. The idea of a menu at the very least is a list of choices that students use to select an activity (or activities) they would like to complete to show their learning. At the very most, it is a complex system where students are given point goals and complete different products to earn points (which are based on the levels of Bloom’s revised taxonomy). These menus should have a way to incorporate a “free choice” option for those picky eaters who would like to make a special order to satisfy their learning hunger.

The next few sections provide examples of different menu formats that will be used in this book. Each menu has its benefits, limitations or drawbacks, and time considerations. An explanation of the free choice option and its management will follow the information on each type of menu.

Noughts-and-Crosses Menu

“The Noughts-and-Crosses was pretty easy to do – all you have to do is know how to play the game.”

– Year 6 student, when asked what he liked about a menu used in his classroom

Description

The Noughts-and-Crosses menu (see Figure 1.1) is a well-known, commonly used menu that contains a total of eight predetermined choices and one free choice for students. These choices can range from task statements leading to product creation, complex and/or higher level processing questions, or leveled problems for solving. The choices can be created at the same level of Bloom’s revised taxonomy (Anderson et al., 2001) or can be arranged in such a way to allow for the three different levels or objectives within a unit or topic. If all choices have been created at the same level of Bloom’s revised taxonomy, then each choice carries the same weight for assessment and has similar expectations for completion time and effort.

Benefits

Flexibility. This menu can cover either one topic in depth, three different topics or three objectives within one content area. When this menu covers just one objective, and all tasks are from the same level of Bloom’s revised taxonomy (preferably the highest), students have the option of completing three projects in a Noughts-and-Crosses pattern, or simply picking three from the menu. When the menu covers three objectives, three different levels of Bloom’s revised taxonomy, or

Figure 1.1. Noughts-and-Crosses menu.

three different learning styles, students will need to complete a vertical or horizontal Noughts-and-Crosses pattern only (either a vertical column or horizontal row) to be sure they have completed one activity from each objective, level and learning style.

Stretching. When students make choices on this menu by completing a row or column based on its design, they will usually face one choice that is out of their comfort zone. This “stretch” may result from a task’s level of Bloom’s revised taxonomy, its product learning style, or its content. Students will complete this “uncomfortable” choice because they want to do the other two in that row or column.

Friendly design. Students quickly understand how to use this menu. It is nonthreatening because it does not contain points, and therefore it seems to encourage students to stretch out of their comfort zones.

Weighting. All products are equally weighted, so recording marks and maintaining paperwork is easily accomplished.

Short time period. They are intended for shorter periods of time, between 1–3 weeks based on the tasks found on the menu as well as the amount of class time allotted for students to work on the menu.

Limitations

Few topics. These menus only cover one or three topics.

Student compromise. Although this menu does allow choice, when following the guidelines of rows or columns only, the menu provides only six different ways to meet the goal. This restriction means a student will sometimes have to compromise and complete an activity they would not have chosen because it completes their Noughts-and-Crosses. (This is not always bad, though!)

Time Considerations

Noughts-and-Crosses menus usually are intended for shorter amounts of completion time – at the most, they could take up to 3 weeks with students working outside of class and submitting one product each week. If a menu focuses on one topic in-depth and the students have time in class to work on their products, the menu could be completed in one week.

List Menu/“Challenge List”

“Of the different formats I tried this year, I really liked the challenge list format. I could modify the menu simply by changing the [point] goal. It was a huge success!”

– Secondary maths teacher

Description

The basic List menu (see Figure 1.2), or Challenge List has a total of at least 10 predetermined choices, each with its own point value, and at least one free choice for students. Choices are simply listed with assigned points based on the levels of Bloom’s revised taxonomy. The choices carry different weights and have different expectations for completion time and effort. A point criterion is set forth that equals 100%, and students choose how they wish to attain that point goal. There are different versions of the list menu included in this book: the challenge list (one topic in depth) and two- or three-topic list menu (which based on its structure can accommodate more than one topic).

Benefits

Grade-as-you-go. This menu requires that teachers mark products as the students complete them. Actively assessing and providing immediate feedback is important so the students can alter their plans and choose to submit additional products to be sure they reach the point goal.

✓			
✓			
✓			
✓			
✓			
✓			
✓			
✓			
✓			
✓			

Figure 1.2. List menu.

Additionally, by grading-as-you-go, teachers will not have piles of products to assess once the menu is completed.

Responsibility. Students have complete control over their marks. Students like the idea that they can guarantee their final mark if they complete their required work and meet the expectations outlined in the rubric and product guidelines. If students do not earn full credit on one of the chosen products, they can complete another product to be sure they have met their point goal. This responsibility over their own marks also allows a shift in thinking about assessment – whereas many students think of marks in terms of how the teacher judged their work, or what the teacher “gave me,” having control over their marks leads students to understand that they earn them.

Different learning levels. This menu has the flexibility to allow for individualized contracts for different learning levels within the classroom. Because classrooms may have many ability levels, it might be necessary to contract students based on their ability or results from the pretesting of content. In which case, each student can contract for a certain number of points for their 100%.

Concept reinforcement. This menu allows for an in-depth study of the material. With the different levels of Bloom’s revised taxonomy being represented, however, students who are at the early stages of learning the concepts can choose lower level value products to reinforce the basics before jumping into the higher level activities.

Variety. A list menu offers a larger variety of product choices. There is guaranteed to be a product of interest to everyone. (And if there isn’t, there is always free choice!)

Limitations

One topic. If using the traditional challenge list format, this menu can only be used for one topic in depth, so that students cannot miss any specific content.

Cannot guarantee objectives. If the traditional challenge menu is used for more than one topic, it is possible for a student to not have to complete an activity for each objective, depending on the choices they make.

Preparation. Teachers need to have all materials ready at the beginning of the unit for students to be able to choose any of the activities on the list. This expectation requires a degree of advanced planning.

Time Considerations

List menus usually are intended for shorter amounts of completion time – at the most, 2 weeks. (*Note:* Once you have assembled the materials, the preparation is minimal!)

Meal Menu

“Seemed pretty easy at first; after all it was only three things and I was thinking I would just have to draw a few equations. All the lunch and dinner real-world stuff was hard – had to really think.”

– Secondary maths student

Description

The Meal menu (see Figure 1.3) is a menu with a total of at least nine predetermined choices as well as two or more enrichment/optional activities for students. The choices are created at the various levels of Bloom’s revised taxonomy and incorporate different learning styles, with the levels getting progressively higher and more complex as students progress from breakfast, to lunch and then to dinner. All products carry the same weight for assessment and have similar expectations for completion time and effort. Some Meal menus may include an enrichment or optional (dessert) option that can be used for bonus marks or to replace another meal option at the teacher’s discretion.

Breakfast

Lunch

Dinner

Dessert

Figure 1.3. Meal menu.

Benefits

Great starter menu. This menu is very straightforward and easy to understand, so time is saved in presenting the completion expectations.

Flexibility. This menu can cover either one topic in depth or three different objectives or aspects within a topic, with each meal representing a different aspect. With this menu, students have the option of completing three products – one from each meal.

Optional enrichment. Although not required, the dessert category of the meal menu allows students to have the option of going further or deeper if time during the unit permits.

Chunkability. The meal menu is very easy to break apart into smaller pieces. Whether you have students who need support in making choices or you only want to focus on one aspect of a topic at a time, this menu can accommodate these decisions. Students could be asked to select a breakfast while the rest of the menu is put on hold until the breakfast product is submitted, then a lunch product is selected, and so on.

Friendly design. Students quickly understand how to use this menu because of its real-world application.

Weighting. All products are equally weighted, so recording marks and maintaining paperwork are easily accomplished with this menu.

Short time period. They are intended for shorter periods of time, between 1–3 weeks.

Limitations

None.

Time Considerations

Meal menus usually are intended for shorter amounts of completion time – at the most, they should take 3 weeks with students working outside of class and submitting one product each week. If a menu focuses on one topic in-depth and the students have time in class to work on their products, the menu could be completed in one week.

20-50-80 Menu

“As you suggested, I used one of your 20-50-80 menus as homework to review equations of a line the week before we went into solving systems of equations. It was very easy for the students to understand and saved so much time at the beginning of the systems unit. I am going to use these more often.”

– Secondary maths teacher

Description

A 20-50-80 menu (see Figure 1.4; Magner, 2000), is a variation on a List menu, with a total of at least eight predetermined choices: no more than two choices with a point value of 20, at least four choices with a point value of 50 and at least two choices with a point value of 80. Choices are assigned these points based on the levels of Bloom’s revised taxonomy. Choices with a point value of 20 represent the “remember” and “understand” levels, choices with a point value of 50 represent the apply and analyse levels, and choices with a point value of 80 represent the evaluate and create levels. All levels of choices carry different weights and have different expectations for completion time and effort. Students are expected to earn 100 points for a 100%. Students choose what combination of products they would like to complete to attain that point goal.

20 Points	
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
50 Points	
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
80 Points	
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____
<input type="checkbox"/>	_____

Figure 1.4. 20-50-80 menu.